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2026 Census topic review: Phase one directions

Overview of phase one of the 2026 Census topic consultation and directions for phase two consultation.

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Introduction

The Census of Population and Housing provides a snapshot of Australia. It shows how our nation changes over time, helps estimate our population and informs critical decisions that guide our future. The Census is collected every five years and measures the number and key characteristics of people in Australia on Census night and the dwellings they live in. Census data is used by people and organisations from all over Australia to inform decisions on issues that impact on our lives.

Every Census, the ABS undertakes a review to inform our recommendation to the Government on the topics that could be included in the Census. Some topics have been included in every Census, allowing comparisons of critical information over time. However, other topics have changed to reflect contemporary views and emerging data needs. You can see a history of topic changes in [Census topics 1911-2021 \(/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions#data-downloads\)](#). There are always more requests for information than can be accommodated in the Census, so new topics need to be prioritised and existing topics considered for removal.

The addition of any new content to the Census needs to be carefully considered to ensure that the public benefit of the data outweighs the cost to the Australian taxpayer of developing the questions, collecting the data and then processing it. The ABS also needs to consider the burden on Australian households of answering additional questions, and whether a longer Census form will decrease the quality of the data collected.

The review of topics for the 2026 Census includes two phases of public consultation, stakeholder engagement and testing. The two phases of public consultation are:

- Phase one: 28 February to 28 April 2023 - understanding what information the public would like the ABS to collect in the Census.
- Phase two: 27 July to 8 September 2023 - consultation on topics being considered for inclusion, change or removal from the 2026 Census. The ABS will commence a feasibility assessment of shortlisted topics during this phase.

This publication provides a summary of the feedback received during the first phase of consultation including the key themes that emerged. It also provides a brief overview of the:

- review process and assessment of submissions
- directions for each topic
- next steps in the topic review process.

The ABS thanks everyone who provided feedback during phase one of the consultation, and for Australia's ongoing support of the Census.

Overview of phase one public consultation

Phase one of the 2026 Census topic consultation was open from 28 February to 28 April 2023. This consultation invited submissions on information the public would like the ABS to collect in the Census.

Supporting information was available on the [ABS website \(/census/2026-census-topic-review/\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-review/), along with a [media release \(/media-centre/media-releases/abs-asks-what-should-be-included-2026-census/\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/abs-asks-what-should-be-included-2026-census/) and a live [webinar \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaoUYdP7OPE\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaoUYdP7OPE) with a question and answer session. The consultation process was promoted through social media, outreach by ABS staff, and direct contact to people and organisations that had expressed interest in Census topics.

The [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation/\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation/) was the primary way that submissions could be made. It allowed for more than one request for information to be made per submission. Submissions were also received via email, mail, and meetings.

During phase one, the ABS also reviewed:

- Submissions received from the 2021 Census consultation for the six shortlisted topics for further consideration and testing, but not included on the form: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity, Gender, Household and family relationships, Journey to education, Sexual orientation and Smoking status.
- Correspondence received by the Australian Statistician and Ministers since the 2021 Census topic consultation process closed in June 2018.
- Feedback and outcomes of recent ABS consultations and statistical standard reviews, including on Religious Affiliation and Family Standards.

The ABS advised during the consultation process that additional submissions were not required if feedback had already been provided via these other channels. The ABS also considered relevant recommendations from parliamentary inquiries and internal ABS data needs.

The public were asked for the following information when making their submission to assist the ABS in making an

informed assessment:

- A brief summary of the information that the submitter would like the ABS to collect and produce statistics on.
- What topic the information most relates to.
- Why it is important that the ABS collect and produce this information.
- The purpose(s) that the information will be used for.
- The smallest area or geography that the information is required.

The ABS strongly encouraged submissions to address three [assessment criteria \(/census/2026-census-topic-consultation/2026-census-topic-assessment-criteria\)](#) to determine the public value generated if the Census collects the information:

1. The topic is of current national importance.
2. There is a need for data at the national level, and either the local level or for small population groups.
3. There is likely to be a continuing need for data on the topic following the Census.

Overview of submissions received during the consultation window

The ABS received 260 submissions during the consultation window. These included submissions received via the ABS Consultation Hub, email, mail, and meetings (where explicitly requested by the stakeholder for minutes to be included as a submission).

Submissions were received from all levels of government, businesses, community groups, advocacy groups, industry bodies/associations, academics and individuals. Submissions from individuals accounted for 41.5% of total submissions.

Phase one submissions received during consultation window(a) by submitter type

Submitter type(b)	Number of submissions	%(c)
Academia/educational institution	15	5.8
Australian government	11	4.2
Business	6	2.3
Community organisation	18	6.9
Individual	108	41.5
Industry body/association	6	2.3
Local government	16	6.2
Non-government organisation	29	11.2
State and territory government	16	6.2
Other(d)	35	13.5
Total	260	100.0

- a. Includes submissions received during the consultation period 28 February to 28 April 2023 via the Consultation Hub, email, mail, and meetings (where explicitly requested by the stakeholder for minutes to be included as a submission).
- b. As reported by primary submitter. Excludes additional individuals and organisations listed in collaborative submissions.
- c. Any discrepancies between totals and sums of percentages are due to rounding.
- d. Includes organisations where the type of organisation was not specified by the submitter.

Forty-four submissions received during the consultation window had multiple individuals and/or organisations contributing to the submission. Several peak bodies also made submissions on behalf of their members.

Overview of all feedback considered as part of phase one topic consultation

In total, the ABS considered 780 pieces of feedback as part of phase one consultation, including the 260 submissions received during the consultation window and five petitions with over 7,000 signatures in total.

Phase one submissions or requests by source(a)

Source	Number
Received during the 2026 Census phase one consultation window (b)	260
Recent ABS standards and classification reviews(c)	199
Recommendations from parliamentary inquiries	6
Letters to the Australian Statistician, Members of Parliament and other correspondence received by ABS since June 2018	205
2021 Census submissions for six shortlisted topics(d)	110
Total submissions	780

- Submissions may contain more than one data request/need.
- Includes submissions received during the consultation period 28 February to 28 April 2023 via the Consultation Hub, email, mail, and meetings (where explicitly requested by the stakeholder for minutes to be included as a submission).
- Includes submissions received during the Religious Affiliation Standard Review, 2022 (excluding submissions only relating to the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups) and the Family Standards Review, 2022.
- Includes submissions received from 2021 Census topic consultation for the six shortlisted topics not included on form.

Topics requested

A number of pieces of feedback received included multiple data requests. In total, there were 930 data requests across all topic themes.

Over one third (34.7%) of data requests across all pieces of feedback related to the Population theme, which includes the topics of Sex, Gender, Variations of sex characteristics, and Sexual orientation. The next most common theme was Cultural diversity (27.0%), with most data requests received during the Religious Affiliation Standard Review, 2022.

Data requests by topic theme and source

Topic themes(a)	2026 Census consultation window	Other sources(b)	Total	%(c)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	33	10	43	4.6
Cultural diversity	36	215	251	27.0
Disability and carers	16	0	16	1.7
Education and training	3	1	4	0.4
Health	48	20	68	7.3
Household and families	27	46	73	7.8
Housing	16	2	18	1.9
Income, work and service with the Australian Defence Force	12	12	24	2.6
Location	5	0	5	0.5
Population	136	187	323	34.7
Transport	18	25	43	4.6
Unpaid work and care	6	2	8	0.9
Other topics(d)	50	4	54	5.8
Total	406	524	930(e)	100.0

- New topic suggestions are included against a theme if they relate to other topics already on the Census.
- Other sources include recent ABS standards and classification reviews, recommendations from parliamentary inquiries, letters to the Australian Statistician, Members of Parliament and other correspondence received by ABS since June 2018, and 2021 Census submissions for six shortlisted topics.
- Any discrepancies between totals and sums of percentages are due to rounding.
- Other topics include Household energy use, Impact of natural disasters, and other data requests that could not be categorised into an existing theme.
- Total data requests is higher than the number of submissions received due to some submissions containing more than one data request.

Assessment of topics

Submissions were grouped into topics and these topics were reviewed against the assessment criteria on public value. Existing topics from the 2021 Census were also reviewed against the same criteria. The public value criteria considered topics of current national importance, the need for data for local levels or small population groups, and a continuing need for the data. Topics with high public value were then assessed as to whether the information need could be met from existing data sources (criterion 4 of the assessment criteria). The topics with the strongest ratings

against the public value criteria have been shortlisted for further consideration.

Including a new topic on the Census is a complex process and even if a topic has high public value this does not mean the Census will be the most appropriate mode of collection. The ABS has used flags to indicate complexity in progressing each potential new topic. This provides an indication of what the ABS will be considering closely during the feasibility assessment which will commence as part of the phase two review process. These flags are:

- Complexity across topics: Topic is dependent on another topic change or potentially impacts the collection of data on another topic.
- Sensitivity: The topic collects information that is classified as “sensitive information” (<https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/your-privacy-rights/your-personal-information/what-is-personal-information>) under The Privacy Act 1988.
- No previous evidence: There is no statistical standard, or previous evidence from Census testing or an ABS survey, that the topic can be asked in one or two questions in a self-completed household form.

These flags have been noted against each new topic in the Detailed topic assessments section.

Summary of topic outcomes

Topics being considered for addition, change or removal

There are 28 new or changed topics that were assessed as having strong public value and will be assessed further in the next phase. This includes 12 new topics and 16 topics with one or more changes flagged (including considering replacing one topic with administrative data). Further detail on these topics is included under the relevant themes.

There are 33 existing topics that will proceed to phase two with no proposed change.

New topics being considered further for inclusion

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity
- Additional measure of disability
- Dwelling occupancy status
- Ethnic identity
- Gender
- Household energy use
- Impact of natural disasters
- Journey to education (Mode of travel to education institution and Name and address of education institution)
- Main reason for moving in last 12 months
- Sexual orientation
- Shared care of children
- Variations of sex characteristics

Existing topics being considered for change

- Ancestry
- Attendance at an educational institution
- Country of birth of parents
- Hours worked
- Household and family relationships

- Labour force status
- Long-term health conditions
- Main language other than English used at home
- Marital status
- Mode of travel to work
- Persons temporarily absent on Census night
- Proficiency in spoken English
- Religious affiliation
- Sex
- Status in employment

Existing topic where collection of data could potentially be replaced with administrative data

Administrative data available on income has been identified as a potential replacement for the existing income question currently included on the Census form. Administrative data for income has been appended to the 2021 Census data and is providing a more detailed view of income than was collected on the Census form. The use of administrative data for income would also support the removal of the burden of answering a question that is relatively complex and takes up significant space on the paper form. There are other potential topics which could be replaced by administrative data in future Censuses, however income has been identified as being the best candidate for consideration for the 2026 Census.

Further detail is provided under the [Income, work and service with the Australian Defence Force \(/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions#income-work-and-service-with-the-australian-defence-force\)](#) theme, including details on the extended consultation process available regarding this proposed change.

Existing topics being considered for removal

There are four existing topics identified for potential removal from the 2026 Census. For these topics, alternative data source(s) have been identified that largely meets the data need, or the data need is not as strong against the public value criteria. Further detail on these topics and information on how you can provide feedback during the phase two consultation are included under the relevant themes below. The topics include:

- Number of children ever born
- Number of employees (employed by owner managers)
- Number of motor vehicles
- Unpaid work – domestic activities

Topics not progressing further for the 2026 Census

The ABS received more information requests than can be considered during phase two of the 2026 Census topic review process. The ABS has needed to prioritise the topics that provide the strongest public value when collected in the Census.

Moderate case for inclusion or change

Some of the topics that have not been shortlisted for phase two have strong public value, however they rated lower because the pace of societal and technological change may reduce the relevance of data collected on the topic

(criterion 3) and/or there is alternative data that partially, or fully, meets the data need (criterion 4). The ABS will consider other ways to provide more data on these topics where possible. These topics are:

- Access to public transport
- COVID-19 vaccination status
- Discrimination
- Financial wellbeing and stress
- Internet access and use, including digital literacy
- Out-of-home care (including institutional care)
- Pregnancy loss
- Smoking status
- Usage of and demand for childcare.

There were two existing topics that also had a moderate case for change but will not be considered further for the 2026 Census. These topics are:

- Unpaid care of children – Amount of time spent caring for children
- Unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, health condition or due to old age – Amount of time spent providing assistance and asking everyone the question rather than just people over 15 years of age.

Low or insufficient case for inclusion or change

There was a range of other information requested that had a lower or insufficient case when assessed against the public value criteria. This was due to limited information being provided or the topic rated lower against the criteria. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Access to and use of services, including Auslan interpreters, gender affirming care and health related services
- Cultural diversity related, including proficiency in all languages, religious practice and mandating the question on religious affiliation
- Date of discharge from the Australian Defence Force (ADF)
- Education related, including literacy, numeracy and micro-credentials
- Food insecurity
- Health and well-being related, including impacts of suicide, time spent indoors and more information on unpaid assistance
- Household and families related, including adoption, remarriage and planned childlessness
- Housing related, including strata titles, home ownership, cooperatives, previous experiences of homelessness and dwelling materials
- Land use
- Location related, including living abroad, location at birth and at educational milestones, internal migration of parents and time spent at current residence
- Other general topics, including attitudes on government policy, impacts of daylight savings time and sports participation
- Pets, including companion animals and medical benefits of animals
- Transport related, including preferred mode of travel, travel time and bicycle/scooter/electric vehicle ownership
- Work related, including previous occupation and employment through government funded providers

A small number of submissions suggested changes to standards and classifications (including geographical boundaries) not used in the Census or were related to other ABS data collections or Census collection procedures

(including collection practices in remote communities). They have been referred to the relevant sections of the ABS for further consideration.

The ABS will not reconsider these topics for the 2026 Census, even if further information on the public value is provided during phase two consultation.

Detailed topic assessments

More information on the topics being considered for addition, change or removal are detailed below. This includes the next steps for these topics in the topic review process and information being requested in the phase two consultation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The Census provides important data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is a key source of information for communities, organisations, businesses and government, and is used to guide the allocation of government funding nationally and for specific services and programs.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought

The ABS is planning to retain the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status topic in its current form. A self-identified measure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin has been included (with some minor variation) in every Census following the 1967 Referendum, and tells an ongoing statistical story for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. You can find more information about the public value of this topic in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](#) under Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

New topics being considered further

Topics and flags indicating areas of further focus

Topics	Complexity across topics(a)	Sensitivity(b)	No previous evidence or current ABS statistical standard(c)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity	Complex	Sensitive	No previous evidence

- a. Topic is dependent on another topic change or potentially impacts the collection of data on another topic.
- b. The topic collects information that is classified as “sensitive information” under The Privacy Act 1988.
- c. There is no statistical standard, or previous evidence from Census testing or an ABS survey, that the topic can be asked in one or two questions in a self-completed household form.

The ABS has received feedback that the current topic on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status does not, on its own, fully reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity. This feedback requested that the ABS collect an additional measure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity. The ABS is considering this further in the topic review process. Information on this topic is detailed below.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity was considered for inclusion in the 2021 Census. It was

described as the group, or groups, an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person identifies with or feels that they belong to.

The ABS has received feedback, including submissions from both the 2026 and the 2021 Census consultation, that there is a need to provide greater insight into the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their connections with communities, nations, and clans/language groups. Feedback indicated it may also help to improve the quality, relevance, and utility of the current Census data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

During development and testing of a question, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people indicated further work was required to ensure respondent understanding and enable the identification with multiple groups. The ABS would need to understand the complexity of collecting, processing and releasing the data in a way that is meaningful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during the feasibility assessment before this topic could proceed to testing for 2026.

Next steps

The ABS will continue to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory groups and representatives, in line with Governance of Indigenous Data principles and practices, to explore options for question(s) and assess the feasibility of including this topic. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Cultural diversity

The Census uses a multidimensional approach to understand ethnicity and cultural diversity in Australia. This includes the collection of ancestry along with other variables such as country of birth, English proficiency, language spoken, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin and religious affiliation, which allow us to better understand the growing ethnic diversity of Australia.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Ancestry	Retain existing topic (subject to prioritisation against new content) – Assess feasibility of increasing the number of ancestries collected (criteria 5 and 6)	Specific feedback sought on impacts of potential change
Australian citizenship	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Country of birth	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Country of birth of parents	Retain existing topic – Investigate feasibility of redesigning the question to be more inclusive and meet data needs	Sufficient feedback received to progress. Option to submit additional feedback available
Main language other than English used at home	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of removing 'at home' or collecting all languages used (criteria 5 and 6)	Specific feedback sought on impacts of potential change
Proficiency in spoken English	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of asking the question of more people (criteria 5 and 6)	Sufficient feedback received to progress. Option to submit additional feedback available
Religious affiliation	Retain existing topic – Review question design and response categories	Specific feedback sought on impacts of potential change
Year of arrival in Australia	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought

The ABS is planning to retain the following topics in their current forms: Australian citizenship, Country of birth, and Year of arrival in Australia. You can find more information about the public value of these topics in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](https://statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census) under Cultural diversity.

Changes are being considered to the topics of Ancestry, Country of birth of parents, Main language other than English used at home, Proficiency in spoken English and Religious affiliation. Information on these topics is detailed below.

Ancestry

The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation on the potential expansion of the Ancestry question to collect up to four ancestries, instead of only two, to reflect more varied multicultural backgrounds. However, allowing additional responses may add complexity when analysing the output data and this needs to be carefully considered and consulted on before making this change.

The ABS also received feedback that there is a need to collect a measure of the ethnicities people identify with in combination with, or in replacement of, ancestry data. Further information on this topic and how it relates to data collected on ancestry can be found in the section on New topics being considered further below.

Next steps

The ABS would specifically like to hear from you on the potential implications of collecting four ancestries. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Country of birth of parents

The 2021 Census asked separate questions on where a person's mother and father were born. The ABS received feedback on the gendered language used in these questions and a preference for the use of non-gendered language such as parent 1 and parent 2. However, engagement with some data users prior to the 2021 Census revealed that it is important to distinguish between the male and female parent as this can have implications for citizenship rights in some countries and is a factor in citizenship analysis. In response to feedback, the ABS added explanatory comments to assist people who had same-sex parents in completing the 2021 Census form.

Next steps

The ABS will consider how to redesign the questions to be more inclusive and to ensure the data collected continues to meet data needs. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Main language other than English used at home and Proficiency in spoken English

The 2021 Census collected information on whether a person uses a language other than English at home and if so, the main non-English language used at home, and self-assessed proficiency in spoken English. The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that the current data collected on language does not fully reflect the linguistic diversity of Australia. Feedback indicated that there are households where some or all household members' main language is not English, but English is used in the household as it is the only common language. People in this situation do not get asked their English proficiency. Removing the 'at home' context from the current question may better allow people to reflect the language they use the most. This could provide an improved understanding of linguistic diversity in Australia and the English proficiency of a broader range of people. However, this would mean the data may not be comparable with data from previous Censuses.

Feedback also indicated that the inability to provide more than one language prevents respondents from providing significant information about Australia's linguistic and cultural diversity. Enabling multiple languages to be collected may also allow for improved sequencing to the English language proficiency question, resulting in more accurate data on this topic.

Next steps

The ABS would like to hear from you on any impacts of these potential changes. The ABS is specifically seeking feedback on:

- any impacts of removing the 'at home' context
- additional use cases for data on multiple languages used.

Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on expanding the number of people who are asked their proficiency in spoken English during the public consultation, there is an option to provide feedback on this topic too. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two). You do not need to provide information that was already included in your phase one submission.

Feedback on the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL) will be sought from stakeholders in late 2023.

Religious affiliation

The 2021 Census collected information on a person's religious affiliation. A question on religion has been included in all Australian Censuses since 1911.

The ABS received feedback during the first Census consultation phase, and the consultation on the Religious Affiliation Standard, that the way the question is currently asked assumes you have a religion. Some feedback requested changes to the religious groups or denominations that are presented in the response categories. Feedback was also received on the structure of the [Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups, 2016 \(ASCRG\) \(/statistics/classifications/australian-standard-classification-religious-groups/latest-release\)](https://statistics.classifications/australian-standard-classification-religious-groups/latest-release). Any changes to how the question on religion is asked may mean the data would not be comparable with data from previous Censuses.

Next steps

The ABS would like to hear from you on any impacts of these potential changes. The ABS is specifically seeking feedback on the introduction of a filter question to understand whether someone has a religion before asking which religion they are affiliated with. You can provide your feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Feedback on the ASCRG will be sought from stakeholders in late 2023.

New topics being considered further

Topics and flags indicating areas of further focus

Topics	Complexity across topics(a)	Sensitivity(b)	No previous evidence or current ABS statistical standard(c)
Ethnic identity	Complex	Sensitive	No previous evidence

a. Topic is dependent on another topic change or potentially impacts the collection of data on another topic.

b. The topic collects information that is classified as "sensitive information" under The Privacy Act 1988.

c. There is no statistical standard, or previous evidence from Census testing or an ABS survey, that the topic can be asked in one or two questions in a self-completed household form.

The ABS has received feedback that there is a need to collect a measure of the ethnicities people identify with in combination with, or in replacement of, ancestry data. The ABS is considering this further in the topic review process. Information on this topic is detailed below.

Ethnic identity

Ancestry in the Australian context is complex as there are many people in Australia with origins and heritage which they may or may not strongly identify or have connection with. The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that there is a desire for data on ethnic identity because it allows people to report on the culture that

they identify with. However, collecting data on ethnic identity is also complex given there are differences in what is understood by the term 'ethnicity'.

While the ABS has a statistical standard for classifying data into ethnic groups (the Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups) which is used for the collection of ancestry, testing would be required to see how well it could capture responses to a question on current ethnic identity as this has not been asked before.

Next steps

The ABS would like to hear from you on any impacts of these potential changes. The ABS is specifically seeking feedback on:

- use cases for collecting information on ethnic identity in addition to ancestry
- the impact if data on ancestry was replaced with ethnic identity.

You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two). You do not need to provide information that was already included in your phase one submission.

Disability and carers

The Census provides important data on the needs of some of the more vulnerable populations across Australia. This information is used to help service providers and government plan what local facilities, services and support are required, such as in-home support, respite care and support to carers. It also provides an understanding of the assistance needed and support being provided by informal and unpaid carers.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Need for assistance in self-care, body movement or communication	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, health condition or due to old age	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought

The ABS is planning to retain the following topics in their current forms: Need for assistance in self-care, body movement or communication, and Unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, health condition or due to old age. You can find more information about the public value of these topics in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](#) under Disability and carers.

New topics being considered further

Topics and flags indicating areas of further focus

Topics	Complexity across topics(a)	Sensitivity(b)	No previous evidence or current ABS statistical standard(c)
Additional measure of disability	Complex	Sensitive	No previous evidence

- Topic is dependent on another topic change or potentially impacts the collection of data on another topic.
- The topic collects information that is classified as "sensitive information" under The Privacy Act 1988.
- There is no statistical standard, or previous evidence from Census testing or an ABS survey, that the topic can be asked in one or two questions in a self-completed household form.

The ABS has received feedback outlining the importance of the Census collecting data on an additional measure of disability and is considering this further in the topic review process. Information on this topic is detailed below.

Additional measure of disability

The 2021 Census collected information on people conceptually described as having a profound or severe limitation. The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that there is a need to identify a broader group of people with disability. Feedback indicated that the current approach excludes a significant proportion of Australians living with disability, and collecting additional data would enhance the development and design of policies and programs targeting people with disability.

Next steps

The ABS will engage with stakeholders, as needed, to explore options for question(s) and assess the feasibility of including this topic. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two/\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two/).

Education and training

The Census provides important data on education and training. This information is used to inform the allocation of education services and understand the characteristics of different population groups such as employment outcomes for people based on their level and field of education.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Attendance at an educational institution	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of new response categories (criteria 5 and 6)	Sufficient feedback received to progress. Option to submit additional feedback available
Highest level of schooling	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Highest non-school qualifications	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought

The ABS is planning to retain the following topics in their current forms: Highest level of schooling, and Highest non-school qualifications. You can find more information about the public value of these topics in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](https://statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census) under Education and training.

The ABS has received feedback outlining the need to improve data collection to identify people who undertake home schooling and is considering this further in the topic review process. Information on this topic is detailed below.

Attendance at an educational institution

The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that there is a need to improve data collection for people who do not attend an institution in person but rather undertake home schooling. Feedback indicated that there is a growing number of children being home schooled in Australia, and capturing this data would inform planning, development, monitoring and resource allocation of educational programs and policies.

Next steps

The ABS will consider how to redesign the response categories to ensure the data collected continues to meet data needs. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two/\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two/).

New topics being considered further

The ABS has received feedback about the need to collect data on a student's journey to education. Further

information on this topic can be found in the [Transport \(/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions#transport\)](#) theme below.

Health

The Census provides important data on long-term health conditions. This information is used to inform health policy and assist with health service planning at more detailed geographic and sub-population levels than ABS health surveys can support, and across a range of socio-economic and demographic dimensions.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Long-term health conditions	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of new response categories (criteria 5 and 6)	Sufficient feedback received to progress. Option to submit additional feedback available

The ABS has received feedback outlining the need to enhance the information collected in the Long-term health conditions question and is considering this further in the topic review process. Information on this topic is detailed below.

Long-term health conditions

The Long-term health conditions topic was first included in the 2021 Census and collected information about the type of selected long-term health condition(s) a person has. The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that requested the collection of additional long-term health conditions as part of this question. Feedback indicated without comprehensive data collection at both the national and local levels, it is difficult to adequately meet their specific health needs. As it will not be possible to accommodate all the requested conditions in the question, the ABS will need to confirm the highest priority conditions prior to testing.

Next steps

The ABS will engage with stakeholders, as needed, to prioritise the existing and requested long-term health conditions to ensure the data collected continues to meet highest priority needs. Following this, the ABS will assess the operational feasibility of any potential changes. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Household and families

The Census collects information about people in a household and their relationship to one another to provide a picture of the composition of Australian families and household structures. This is used for planning support services and infrastructure, such as childcare, educational institutions and social services. It is also useful for understanding the adequacy and availability of housing.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Household and family relationships	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of improving data on diverse family structures (criteria 5 and 6)	Sufficient feedback to progress. Option to submit additional feedback available
Marital status	Retain existing topic – Review response categories (criteria 5 and 6)	Sufficient feedback to progress. Option to submit additional feedback available
Persons temporarily absent on Census night	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of asking additional questions (criteria 5 and 6)	Sufficient feedback to progress. Option to submit additional feedback available

Changes are being considered to the topics of Household and family relationships, Marital status, and Persons temporarily absent on Census night. Information on these topics is detailed below.

Household and family relationships

Changes to the Household and family relationships topic were considered for the 2021 Census. The ABS has received feedback, including submissions from both the 2026 and the 2021 Census consultation, that there is a need to understand more complex household and family structures, including diverse families and kinship care arrangements. Feedback indicated this data would provide a better understanding of household and family diversity within local communities, and assist in policy development and service delivery, particularly targeting payments and support services to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Previous investigations found that changes to this topic required significant redevelopment of data processing systems and a substantial investment of resources to implement. Due to this, no changes were made for the 2021 Census. This will need to be considered as part of the feasibility assessment before this topic could proceed to testing for 2026.

Next steps

The ABS will explore options for question(s) and assess the feasibility of changing this topic. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Marital status

The 2021 Census collected information on a person's formal registered marital status. The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that the current registered marital status question should be expanded to capture de facto relationships, including separation from a de facto relationship. De facto relationships and married couples are often treated the same under Australian Commonwealth laws and are both supported by family-related services in Australia.

The Census does produce data on de facto relationships. However, it is derived based on current living arrangements and the data can only be provided if both people in the de facto relationship are living in the same dwelling on Census night. There is no current way to produce data on people who are separated from a de facto relationship. Information on social marital status is available in our [Census dictionary \(/census/guide-census-data/census-dictionary/2021/variables-topic/household-and-families/social-marital-status-mdcp\)](https://censusdictionary.abs.gov.au/census/guide-census-data/census-dictionary/2021/variables-topic/household-and-families/social-marital-status-mdcp).

Next steps

The ABS will consider how to redesign the response categories to ensure the data collected continues to meet data needs. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Persons temporarily absent on Census night

Not everyone who usually lives in a household will be there on Census night. The 2021 Census collected information about people who are temporarily away from home to determine the usual composition of a household and generate accurate estimates of the usual population in an area. The current Census questions about people temporarily absent from the household include name, sex, date of birth or age, student status, relationship to others in the household, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

The ABS is investigating options to include additional Census questions about people temporarily absent from the

household to improve data quality.

Next steps

The ABS will explore options for question(s) and assess the feasibility of changing this topic. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

New topics being considered further

Topics and flags indicating areas of further focus

Topics	Complexity across topics(a)	Sensitivity(b)	No previous evidence or current ABS statistical standard(c)
Shared care of children	Complex	Not flagged	No previous evidence

- a. Topic is dependent on another topic change or potentially impacts the collection of data on another topic.
- b. The topic collects information that is classified as “sensitive information” under The Privacy Act 1988.
- c. There is no statistical standard, or previous evidence from Census testing or an ABS survey, that the topic can be asked in one or two questions in a self-completed household form.

The ABS has received feedback outlining the need for information on shared care arrangements and is considering this further in the topic review process. Information on this topic is detailed below.

Shared care of children

Shared care of children was considered for inclusion in the 2021 Census. The ABS has received feedback, including submissions from both the 2026 and the 2021 Census consultation, that there is a need for information on parents or children who live across multiple households. This includes the amount of time spent in each household. Feedback indicated this data would enhance understanding of the social and economic implications of shared care arrangements and help inform policy development and service delivery.

Some administrative data is available relating to children of separated parents living in more than one household, but this does not include parents who have private or informal care arrangements.

Previous investigations, and the inclusion of this topic in ABS surveys, have demonstrated significant complexities and costs associated with capturing and processing details of shared care arrangements. Due to this, the topic was not included in the 2021 Census. This will need to be considered as part of the feasibility assessment before this topic could proceed to testing for 2026.

Next steps

The ABS will explore options for question(s) and assess the feasibility of including this topic. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Housing

The Census provides important data on housing. This information is used to provide an indication of the number and types of homes around Australia as well as information on ownership, renting and costs in terms of rent or mortgage payments. It is also used to estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness in Australia.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Housing costs	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Landlord type for rented dwellings	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Number of bedrooms	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Other private dwelling information (including structure, location and residential status)	Retain existing topics	No further feedback sought
Other non-private dwelling information (including name, address, type, number of persons resident and their residential status)	Retain existing topics	No further feedback sought
Type of tenure (including ownership and rental)	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought

The ABS is planning to retain the following topics in their current forms: Housing costs, Landlord type for rented dwellings, Number of bedrooms, Other private dwelling information, Other non-private dwelling information, and Type of tenure. You can find more information about the public value of these topics in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](https://statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census) under Housing.

The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that there is a need for improvements to the classification of retirement villages, manufactured home estates and caravan parks. The ABS is undertaking a minor review of the Special Dwellings Classification, an important component of the ABS Address Register. Feedback on the classification will be considered as part of the review. Any resulting changes to improve the accuracy of the Special Dwellings Classification will be incorporated into field procedures during the data collection phase of the 2026 Census.

Feedback was also received to develop more culturally sensitive language and phrasing for terms relating to housing and homelessness that better reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences. The ABS will consult further on this with stakeholders.

New topics being considered further

Topics and flags indicating areas of further focus

Topics	Complexity across topics(a)	Sensitivity(b)	No previous evidence or current ABS statistical standard(c)
Dwelling occupancy status	Complex	Not flagged	No previous evidence

- Topic is dependent on another topic change or potentially impacts the collection of data on another topic.
- The topic collects information that is classified as "sensitive information" under The Privacy Act 1988.
- There is no statistical standard, or previous evidence from Census testing or an ABS survey, that the topic can be asked in one or two questions in a self-completed household form.

The ABS has received feedback on the importance of the Census collecting further information on dwellings that are unoccupied and is considering this further in the topic review process. Information on this topic is detailed below.

Dwelling occupancy status

The 2021 Census collected information on the number of dwellings that were occupied and unoccupied on Census night. This is informed by observations made by staff in the field, self-reporting by respondents, and administrative data. However, this does not include the reasons why a dwelling is unoccupied.

The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that there is a need for additional information on dwelling occupancy. This includes identifying the reasons why residential properties are unoccupied, and where people own more than one dwelling to understand the use of additional dwellings. Feedback indicated this information would be useful to inform policy and planning for Australia's housing needs.

Next steps

The ABS will explore options for question(s) and assess the feasibility of including this topic. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Income, work and service with the Australian Defence Force

The Census collects important information about income and work to provide insight into Australian society and the performance of the economy. The information is used to provide an indication of living standards within various household types, highlight how many people are working or looking for work at a local level, and to plan for education and other services. Understanding service with the Australian Defence Force also provides information to enable better delivery of services and support for veterans.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Hours worked	Retain existing topic – Assess change from actual hours worked to usual hours worked	Sufficient feedback received to progress. Option to submit additional feedback available
Income	Potential removal – Assess feasibility of replacing with administrative data	Specific feedback sought through separate consultation
Industry of employment	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Labour force status	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of collecting data on joblessness (criteria 5 and 6)	Specific feedback sought on collection of additional data
Main tasks in occupation	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Number of employees (employed by owner managers)	Potential removal	Specific feedback sought on impact if removed
Occupation	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Service with the Australian Defence Force	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Status in employment	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of collecting data on employment arrangements (criteria 5 and 6)	Specific feedback sought on collection of additional data

The ABS is planning to retain the following topics in their current forms: Industry of employment, Main tasks in occupation, Occupation, and Service with the Australian Defence Force. You can find more information about the public value of these topics in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](https://statistics.research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census) under Income and work, and Service with the Australian Defence Force.

The ABS is undertaking a comprehensive review of the [Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations \(ANZSCO\) \(/about/consultation-and-conferences/updating-anzsco\)](https://about.consultation-and-conferences/updating-anzsco) in 2023 and 2024 to reflect the contemporary labour market and better meet stakeholders' needs. The updated classification will be implemented in the 2026 Census.

Changes are being considered to the topic of Income and a number of the work topics (Hours worked, Labour force status, Number of employees, and Status in employment). Information on these topics is detailed below.

Income

The 2021 Census collected information on the total income (in ranges) that a person usually receives each week. The ABS has assessed that there is still strong public value in having income variables in the Census dataset. However, due to the complexity of the question, the ABS has been investigating whether administrative data could replace the existing income question on the Census form. The main reasons for prioritising investigations on using administrative data on income over other topics with administrative data sources include:

- to reduce the reporting burden of respondents
- the ability to provide greater detail and accuracy about income (e.g. source of income)
- the length of the question may provide space on the Census form for other higher priority topics to be collected if it was removed.

In April 2023, the ABS released preliminary findings from its investigation in [Understanding income in administrative data, the Census and ABS surveys \(/statistics/detailed-methodology-information/information-papers/understanding-income-administrative-data-census-and-abs-surveys\)](#). Three income variables created from administrative data were also added to the 2021 Census TableBuilder file. These were Total income (weekly), Main source of income and Main type of government benefit payment, recorded in the 2020-21 financial year. These new items were calculated using linked data from the Multi-Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP) asset.

While this administrative data provides more detail than is currently collected in the Census, it is important to understand if this data will meet the needs of data users.

On 15 August 2023, the ABS will release the Administrative Data Snapshot of Population and Housing (ADS) which provides Census-like data built from administrative sources, including income. This release will be accompanied by a four-month public consultation process on the value of this type of data, including the use of administrative data in future Censuses. The ABS appreciate that data users will need time to investigate the utility of the administrative income data for their purposes. As such, the ABS is seeking any feedback you have on the use of administrative income data via the ADS consultation process instead of the phase two consultation process. Any feedback provided through the ADS consultation process will be considered prior to making a recommendation to Government on the 2026 Census topics.

Next steps

The ABS would like to hear from you on whether income from administrative data will continue to meet your needs if it replaces the direct collection of income data on the Census, and whether the additional information such as main source of income is useful. You can provide feedback through the ADS consultation process. Please email census.futures@abs.gov.au (<mailto:census.futures@abs.gov.au>) for updates on the ADS consultation.

Work

The 2021 Census collected data relating to work, including:

- Labour force status (Employed; Unemployed; Not in the labour force)
- Status in employment (Employee; Owner manager; Contributing family worker), including Incorporation status and Number of employees (employed by owner managers)
- Hours worked
- Occupation
- Industry of employment

The ABS has received feedback outlining the importance of collecting this data in the Census, however there is a need to ensure that the data collected is of the highest public value.

The ABS is considering removing the topic of Number of employees (employed by owner managers) and questions relating to the topic of Status in employment for the 2026 Census. Alternative data sources are available that provide information relating to owner managers incorporation status and/or the number of employees of their business.

These alternative data sources include the monthly [Labour Force Survey \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release\)](#), [Jobs in Australia \(/statistics/labour/jobs/jobs-australia/2015-16-2019-20\)](#) (which uses personal income tax data available from the Linked Employer Employee Dataset (LEED)), and [Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits \(/statistics/economy/business-indicators/counts-australian-businesses-including-entries-and-exits/latest-release\)](#). Given the availability of

alternative data sources, the current public value of Census data relating to people who have their own business is not well known or understood.

Feedback also indicated that collecting additional information related to work, such as a broader measure of joblessness and employment arrangements/job security, may be more beneficial than the information currently collected relating to owner managers. Data on all people who don't have a job but want a job (not just those who are unemployed) and their availability to work could provide a broader view of 'joblessness' and the potential labour force. Data on whether an employee is working on a permanent, casual or fixed-term basis could also provide a view of job security.

The ABS is also investigating options to change the Hours worked topic from actual hours to usual hours worked to ensure this topic continues to meet user needs.

Next steps

The ABS would like to hear from you on any impacts of these potential changes. The ABS is specifically seeking feedback on:

- the impact of removing the topic of Number of employees (employed by owner managers) and questions relating to the topic of Status in employment, including why alternative data sources cannot meet that need
- whether there is more public value in the Census collecting information on joblessness and employment arrangements/job security.

You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Location

The Census provides important information for small geographic areas and small population groups across the country. Questions about usual residence and past residences are critical for population estimates and projections.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Address on Census night	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Internal migration (Address one year ago)	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Internal migration (Address five years ago)	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Usual residence at Census time	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought

The ABS is planning to retain the following topics in their current forms: Address on Census night, Address one year ago, Address five years ago and Usual residence at Census time. You can find more information about the public value of these topics in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](#) under Location.

New topics being considered further

Topics and flags indicating areas of further focus

Topics	Complexity across topics(a)	Sensitivity(b)	No previous evidence or current ABS statistical standard(c)
Main reason for moving in last 12 months	Not flagged	Not flagged	Not flagged

- a. Topic is dependent on another topic change or potentially impacts the collection of data on another topic.
- b. The topic collects information that is classified as “sensitive information” under The Privacy Act 1988.
- c. There is no statistical standard, or previous evidence from Census testing or an ABS survey, that the topic can be asked in one or two questions in a self-completed household form.

The ABS has received feedback to enhance the information collected about internal migration and is considering this further in the topic review process. This includes the need to collect data on the main reason for moving for those who had changed address in the past 12 months. Information on this topic is detailed below.

Main reason for moving in last 12 months

Understanding and planning for population change is a focus area for all levels of government across Australia. Population changes such as age, skill sets and household and family composition impact the labour market, service provision (including health, education and utilities), housing and infrastructure.

The 2021 Census collected information on who has moved but does not provide information on the reason for that move. The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that this additional information would support policy areas and enable better population projections, policies and planning at the national, state/territory and local government level.

The ABS has collected the main reason for moving in other surveys, however these do not allow for an understanding of migration patterns at the small area level or for small population groups which limits its utility for state, territory, and local government planning.

Next steps

The ABS will explore options for question(s) and assess the feasibility of including this topic. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Population

The Census provides key information for the ABS to meet its legislative requirement to produce statistics on the number of people of each state across Australia. The age and sex detail provided in the Census is used in the estimation of the population. Critical decisions are made by governments, businesses and local community groups that depend on knowing the composition of the population located in each part of Australia.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Date of birth or age	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Name	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Number of children ever born	Potential removal from 2026 Census – Assess impacts of moving to a 10-year cycle	Specific feedback sought on impact if removed from 2026 Census
Sex	Retain existing topic – Review question design to specifically collect sex recorded at birth and response categories used	Sufficient feedback received to progress. Option to provide additional feedback available

The collection of names helps households navigate the Census form and answer the right question for each person in the household. The collection of names and addresses also supports statistical processes that are a critical part of

ensuring the quality and value of the Census. After data collection and processing, names and addresses are separated from other information on the Census form and stored securely and separately.

The ABS is planning to retain the following topics in their current forms: Name, and Date of birth or age. You can find more information about the public value of these topics in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](https://statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census) under Population.

Changes to the Sex topic are being considered further in the topic review process. The topic of Number of children ever born is proposed to move back to collection on a ten-yearly cycle, commencing in 2021 to align with international reporting. Information on these topics is detailed below.

Number of children ever born

The 2021 Census collected information on the number of children ever born to each female aged 15 years and over. Prior to 2011, the question was asked every ten years, and this was sufficient to meet the data needs to inform population projections. The ABS communicated during the 2021 Census content consultation that the topic would be retained in 2021 to align with international reporting, but that the ABS would consider moving back to the ten-yearly cycle for the 2026 Census. In line with this, this topic is identified for potential removal in the 2026 Census. The ABS want to understand what impact this would have before making a recommendation to Government.

The ABS also received feedback requesting changes to the topic. This included asking the question to all people aged 15 years and over, not just those who identify as female. This ensures that individuals who do not identify as female but have given birth are able to answer the question. Evidence was also provided that collecting the information of all people over 15 years and over would support a broader analysis of fertility patterns. The ABS will investigate these changes before the Number of children ever born topic is next included on the Census form.

Next steps

The ABS would like to hear from you on any impacts if this topic was removed from the 2026 Census and next collected in the 2031 Census. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two). The ABS will work with stakeholders to re-design and test a more inclusive question the next time the topic is collected in the Census.

Sex

Sex is a critical statistical variable of national and international importance and is used in producing population estimates as required under the Census and Statistics Act 1905. A question on sex has been included in every Australian Census since the first national Census in 1911.

A person's sex is based on their sex characteristics, such as their chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs. While typically based upon the sex characteristics observed and recorded at birth or infancy, a person's reported sex can change over the course of their lifetime and may differ from their sex recorded at birth. To date, the ABS has asked for a person's sex, without specifying whether this was sex at birth or at the time of completing the Census.

The 2021 Census allowed people to select from three response options for the sex question: male, female, and non-binary sex. The purpose of the addition of the non-binary sex option was to allow respondents to participate in the Census when the male or female sex categories did not accurately describe their sex at the time of completing the Census. However, this addition did not yield meaningful data. The ABS has published an [analysis \(/articles/analysis-non-binary-sex-responses\)](https://statistics/articles/analysis-non-binary-sex-responses) on the responses to this question.

The majority of feedback received regarding this topic requested that the Census collect 'Sex recorded at birth' from the ABS [Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables \(/statistics/standards/standard-sex-gender-variations-sex-characteristics-and-sexual-orientation-variables/latest-release\)](https://statistics/standards/standard-sex-gender-variations-sex-characteristics-and-sexual-orientation-variables/latest-release). The main reason for this request is to enable the ABS to collect data which more accurately reflects sex recorded at birth

and to produce data on the transgender and gender diverse community. This is only possible if a question on sex recorded at birth is collected separately from a question on gender. The final design of the question on sex will be impacted by the decision on the inclusion of the Gender topic.

Next steps

The ABS will continue to engage with stakeholders and consider how to redesign the question and response categories. This includes whether the Census should collect 'sex recorded at birth'. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

New topics being considered further

Topics and flags indicating areas of further focus

Topics	Complexity across topics(a)	Sensitivity(b)	No previous evidence or current ABS statistical standard(c)
Gender	Complex	Not flagged	Not flagged
Sexual orientation	Not flagged	Sensitive	Not flagged
Variations of sex characteristics	Complex	Sensitive	Not flagged

- a. Topic is dependent on another topic change or potentially impacts the collection of data on another topic.
- b. The topic collects information that is classified as "sensitive information" under The Privacy Act 1988.
- c. There is no statistical standard, or previous evidence from Census testing or an ABS survey, that the topic can be asked in one or two questions in a self-completed household form.

The topics of Gender, Sexual orientation, and Variations of sex characteristics are being considered further in the topic review process. Evidence put forward in submissions, other feedback and parliamentary inquiry recommendations often covered these three topics together, in addition to changing the question on sex. The ABS has attempted to separate out the unique elements of each topic below, however, the ABS recognise the significant overlap in data needs. The ABS [Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/standard-sex-gender-variations-sex-characteristics-and-sexual-orientation-variables/latest-release\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/standard-sex-gender-variations-sex-characteristics-and-sexual-orientation-variables/latest-release) includes further definitional information on these topics.

Gender

Gender was considered for inclusion in the 2021 Census. The ABS has received feedback, including submissions from both the 2026 and the 2021 Census consultation, that there is a need to collect gender in addition to changing the question on sex to collect 'sex recorded at birth'.

Gender is a social and cultural concept. It is about social and cultural differences in identity, expression and experience as a man, woman, or non-binary person. Non-binary is an umbrella term describing gender identities that are not exclusively male or female.

If the ABS collects sex recorded at birth in the 2026 Census, the combination of these two topics would provide an opportunity to produce counts for the transgender and gender diverse community. It may also enhance the quality and accuracy of data relating to a person's sex.

Feedback pointed to research that people who are transgender and gender diverse experience poorer physical and mental health outcomes, lower access to secure housing, and are at an increased risk of poverty, discrimination and violence. There were examples provided as to how collecting this data would help contribute to informed policy and planning, resource allocation and program monitoring to improve the outcomes for this population.

This topic was tested extensively for the 2021 Census using qualitative methods with a broad range of respondents and generally performed well at the time. The ABS has since developed a standard question and started collecting

gender in its household surveys.

Next steps

The ABS will continue to engage with stakeholders and assess the feasibility of including this topic, particularly the collection of this information on a form completed by the household. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation was considered for inclusion in the 2021 Census. The ABS has received feedback, including submissions from both the 2026 and the 2021 Census consultation, that there is a need for the collection of sexual orientation in the Census. Feedback pointed to the lack of a reliable evidence base about people who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or use a different term to describe their sexual orientation. The research available indicates that these groups often have higher levels of vulnerability including experiences of discrimination and abuse, and associated mental health issues, that require targeted support.

There were examples provided as to how collecting this data would help contribute to the development of policy, allocation of resources and delivery of services at both the national and local level to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or use a different term and their families.

This topic was tested extensively prior to the 2021 Census, including with respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or use a different term. This testing identified sensitivities, including privacy concerns about answering this question with other members of the household present.

Next steps

The ABS will continue to engage with stakeholders and assess the feasibility of including this topic, particularly the collection of this information on a form completed by the household. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Variations of sex characteristics

The ABS has received feedback that there is a significant data gap on information about the number of people with variations of sex characteristics.

Variations of sex characteristics refers to people with innate genetic, hormonal or physical sex characteristics that do not conform to medical norms for female or male bodies. It refers to a wide spectrum of variations to genitals, hormones, chromosomes and/or reproductive organs.

The medical needs of people with variations of sex characteristics are unique and complex. Feedback indicated that having the opportunity to analyse data on variations of sex characteristics with other Census variables, such as long-term health conditions, would provide valuable information to inform service delivery.

Understanding the number of people who have variations of sex characteristics may also help government and non-government organisations to plan, legislate and provide resources to support individuals and their families. The small size of this population group means that sample surveys are unable to produce both national and lower-level estimates.

Next steps

The ABS will continue to engage with stakeholders to explore options for this question and assess the feasibility of including this topic, particularly the collection of this information on a form completed by the household. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Transport

The Census collects information about where people work and how they get to work to help inform planning of road infrastructure and public transportation. It also helps to ensure public services are available where people are most likely to access them during the day.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Mode of travel to work	Retain existing topic – Review question design and response categories	Sufficient feedback received to progress. Option to provide additional feedback available
Name and address of workplace attended	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Number of motor vehicles	Potential removal	Specific feedback requested on impacts if removed

The ABS is planning to retain the Name and address of workplace attended topic in its current form. You can find more information about the public value of the topic in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census) under Transport.

Changes to the Mode of travel to work topic are being considered further in the topic review process. The topic of Number of motor vehicles is identified for potential removal in the 2026 Census. Information on these topics is detailed below.

Mode of travel to work

The 2021 Census collected information on the method of travel to work on the day of Census, for each person aged 15 years and over who was employed during the week before the Census.

The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that requested the inclusion of more contemporary modes of travel as response categories. The response categories will be reviewed to ensure they continue to meet user needs. Allowing additional responses may add complexity when processing the data and analysing the output data. It may also be harder for the public to respond to the question. Feedback also indicated that asking for the method of travel for one day in the week may not reflect regular patterns of travel behaviour. The impact of any change needs to be carefully considered during the feasibility assessment.

Next steps

The ABS will engage with stakeholders, as needed, to understand any impacts of potential changes and to ensure the data collected continues to meet data needs. Following this, the ABS will assess the feasibility of any potential changes. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Number of motor vehicles

The 2021 Census collected information on the number of registered motor vehicles owned or used by household members that were garaged or parked at or near private dwellings on Census night.

The ABS is considering removing this topic for the 2026 Census given alternative data sources are available that provide information relating to the number of motor vehicles. The alternative data sources include state and territory vehicle registrations and [Road Vehicles, Australia \(https://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/2023/road-vehicles-australia-january-2023\)](https://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/2023/road-vehicles-australia-january-2023) by the Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics.

Next steps

The ABS would like to hear from you on any impacts if this topic was removed from the Census, specifically focusing on why the alternative data sources cannot meet that need. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

New topics being considered further

Topics and flags indicating areas of further focus

Topics	Complexity across topics(a)	Sensitivity(b)	No previous evidence or current ABS statistical standard(c)
Journey to education (Mode of travel to education institution and Name and address of education institution)	Not flagged	Not flagged	No previous evidence

- a. Topic is dependent on another topic change or potentially impacts the collection of data on another topic.
- b. The topic collects information that is classified as “sensitive information” under The Privacy Act 1988.
- c. There is no statistical standard, or previous evidence from Census testing or an ABS survey, that the topic can be asked in one or two questions in a self-completed household form.

The ABS has received feedback about the need to collect data on a student’s journey to education and is considering this further in the topic review process. Information on this topic is detailed below.

Journey to education (Mode of travel to education institution and Name and address of education institution)

Journey to education was considered for inclusion in the 2021 Census. The ABS has received feedback, including submissions from both the 2026 and the 2021 Census consultation, that there is a need for information on journey to education. Travel for educational purposes makes up a significant portion of peak hour travel, and feedback indicated that when combined with journey to work data, this information would improve understanding of traffic flows and transport patterns.

Previous testing demonstrated complexities in capturing data on this topic. This included concerns of accuracy and respondent burden, as well as whether data on the topic can be collected, processed and disseminated efficiently. This will need to be considered as part of the feasibility assessment before this topic could proceed to testing for 2026.

Next steps

The ABS will continue to engage with stakeholders to explore options for question(s) and assess the feasibility of including this topic. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Unpaid work and care

The Census provides important data on unpaid work and care. This information is used to inform planning of local facilities and services such as childcare and provides insight into how individuals and families balance unpaid work

with other aspects of their lives.

Existing topics

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Unpaid care of children	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought
Unpaid work – domestic activities	Potential removal	Specific feedback sought on impact if removed
Unpaid work – voluntary work for an organisation or group	Retain existing topic	No further feedback sought

The ABS is planning to retain the following topics in their current forms: Unpaid care of children, and Unpaid work – voluntary work for an organisation or group. You can find more information about the public value of these topics in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census) under Unpaid work and care.

The topic of Unpaid work – domestic activities is identified for potential removal in the 2026 Census. Information on this topic is detailed below.

Unpaid work – domestic activities

The 2021 Census collected information on the number of hours (in ranges) people spent in the previous week doing domestic work without pay. The ABS is considering removing this topic for the 2026 Census given alternative data sources are available that provide information relating to unpaid domestic work. The alternative data sources include the [Time Use Survey \(TUS\) \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/how-australians-use-their-time/2020-21\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/how-australians-use-their-time/2020-21) and the [Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia \(HILDA\) Survey \(https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda\)](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda). The ABS is conducting the TUS on an on-going basis from 2024.

Next steps

The ABS would like to hear from you on any impacts if this topic was removed from the Census, specifically focusing on why the alternative data sources cannot meet that need. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Other topics

New topics being considered further

Topics and flags indicating areas of further focus

Topics	Complexity across topics(a)	Sensitivity(b)	No previous evidence or current ABS statistical standard(c)
Household energy use	Not flagged	Not flagged	No previous evidence
Impact of natural disasters	Not flagged	Not flagged	No previous evidence

- a. Topic is dependent on another topic change or potentially impacts the collection of data on another topic.
- b. The topic collects information that is classified as “sensitive information” under The Privacy Act 1988.
- c. There is no statistical standard, or previous evidence from Census testing or an ABS survey, that the topic can be asked in one or two questions in a self-completed household form.

Household energy use

The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation requesting information related to household energy use. This included data on source or connection to utilities, energy consumption and the energy efficiency of appliances. Examples of Government policies and programs that would benefit from the data were provided, including supporting the transition to a net zero carbon emission future.

The ABS is investigating options to meet this information need. This includes Census, other data collection activities, and administrative data.

Next steps

The ABS will continue to engage with stakeholders to explore options for collecting data on this topic. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Impact of natural disasters

Census data is already used extensively in frameworks and strategies related to natural disaster risk and recovery. The ABS received feedback during the first phase of consultation that highlighted the importance of collecting additional data specifically on the impact natural disasters have on the Australian population. This included data on who has been impacted by natural disasters and what type, financial loss, insurance status, and mitigations taken to reduce the impact of future natural disasters. Feedback indicated that there are significant social, environmental, and economic ramifications when these events occur. The information may assist in informing preparedness, mitigation, adaptation, response, recovery and reconstruction.

The ABS is investigating options to meet these information needs. This includes Census, other data collection activities, and administrative data.

Next steps

The ABS will continue to engage with stakeholders to explore options for collecting data on this topic. Although the ABS is not requesting specific feedback on this topic during the public consultation, there is an option to provide additional feedback. You can provide feedback via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

Next steps

Phase two consultation and engagement

Phase two consultation is open from 27 July to 8 September 2023 via the [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two).

During this consultation, the ABS is specifically seeking feedback on the topics where further information is required to help inform our assessment and recommendation. These are summarised in the table below.

Topics	Topic direction	Information that would assist ABS
Ancestry	Retain existing topic (subject to prioritisation against new content) – Assess feasibility of increasing the number of ancestries collected (criteria 5 and 6)	Specific feedback sought on impacts of potential change
Ethnic identity	Potential new topic	Specific feedback sought on collection of additional data
Labour force status	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of collecting data on joblessness (criteria 5 and 6)	Specific feedback sought on collection of additional data
Main language other than English used at home	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of removing 'at home' or collecting all languages used (criteria 5 and 6)	Specific feedback sought on impacts of potential change
Number of children ever born	Potential removal from 2026 Census – Assess impacts of moving to a ten-yearly cycle	Specific feedback sought on impact if removed from 2026 Census
Number of employees (employed by owner managers)	Potential removal	Specific feedback sought on impact if removed
Number of motor vehicles	Potential removal	Specific feedback sought on impact if removed
Religious affiliation	Retain existing topic – Review question design and response categories	Specific feedback sought on impacts of potential change
Status in employment	Retain existing topic – Assess feasibility of collecting data on employment arrangements (criteria 5 and 6)	Specific feedback sought on collection of additional data
Unpaid work – domestic activities	Potential removal	Specific feedback sought on impact if removed

There is the opportunity to provide additional feedback in the Consultation Hub on the other topics being considered for inclusion or change.

There will be a separate consultation process where you can provide feedback on whether income from administrative data will continue to meet your needs if it replaces the direct collection of income data in the 2026 Census. This consultation process will commence on 15 August 2023 and run for four months. Please email census.futures@abs.gov.au (<mailto:census.futures@abs.gov.au>) for updates on this consultation.

The ABS will engage with stakeholders, as needed, to clarify data needs and to ensure that recommendations on topics are well-informed. This may include ABS advisory groups, government departments and other organisations that provided submissions during the first phase of consultation or represent specific population groups where topic changes are being considered.

Further assessment and testing

The ABS will continue to shortlist topics against the pre-determined criteria to determine if the Census is the most appropriate way to provide data on the topic. This will include:

- Independent Privacy Impact Assessment: The ABS has engaged an independent privacy service provider to undertake the first of three Privacy Impact Assessments (PIA) for the 2026 Census. This PIA will consider and inform Census topic directions.
- Testing: Not all topics considered during phase two consultation and review will proceed to testing. Those topics that do proceed will be tested through a mix of focus groups, cognitive interviews, and a large-scale test.

In late 2023, the ABS will share the outcomes of phase two, including the topics recommended for removal and topics that have proceeded to testing. Not all topics that are tested will be recommended to the Australian Government for inclusion in the 2026 Census.

Recommendation to Government

The Australian Government decides which topics are collected in the Census. The ABS will make a recommendation to Government in mid-2024 on the topics that could be included in the 2026 Census.

The topics in each Census are prescribed by Parliament in the Census and Statistics Regulation 2016. Following Government decision on topics for inclusion in the 2026 Census, the Census and Statistics Regulation 2016 will be amended and tabled in both houses of the Australian Parliament.

Outcomes and topics to be included in the 2026 Census will be published on the ABS website in late 2025.

Data downloads

Census topics 1911-2021

↓ [Download XLSX](#)

[62.61 KB]